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SONGS OF A JEW





# SONGS OF A JEW

BY

P. M. RASKIN

AUTHOR OF "GHETTO-LIEDER"

WITH A FOREWORD

By ISRAEL ZANGWILL

LONDON

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS, LIMITED

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## FOREWORD

BY ISRAEL ZANGWILL

EVERY ghetto is now a nest of singing-birds. But the Yiddish poet has so far made his appearance in English literature only by way of a version of Morris Rosenfeld's *Songs from the Ghetto*. If there is nothing in the present volume that reaches the intensity or the originality of Rosenfeld's *In the Sweat Shop*—that palpitating protest against mechanical drudgery which leaves Hood's *Song of the Shirt* as far behind as the sewing-machine leaves the needle—Mr Raskin has yet the unique distinction of expressing himself in English almost as trippingly as in Yiddish. It is only in 1910 that this "alien immigrant" published in his adopted town of Leeds—where he seems to have become a Member of the Royal Sanitary Institute (!)—a Yiddish collection entitled *Ghetto-Lieder*, with a preface by "Schalom Aleichem," the Yiddish Mark Twain. And now he has already mastered English sufficiently to write in the language—if not of Shakespeare—of Longfellow. There are those who, in the spirit of Dr Johnson, might wish that this feat were not only difficult but impossible. For it is obvious that the

magic of language will come much more readily to the sorcerer who is using his "mammy-language"—as Yiddish cooingly has it—than to one struggling with an idiom acquired and alien. And yet English is, after all, not so alien from Yiddish, for Yiddish is at root German, and German and English are of the same Teutonic family—shall we say cousins-German? Whatever the oft-alleged difficulty of translating Heine, it does not lie in his metres, for German and English run into much the same lyrical grooves. It was, in fact, a much greater feat for Heine to write in French than for Mr Raskin to write in English. Nevertheless, there is an aroma in Mr Raskin's Yiddish poems which even he has not been able to preserve in its native freshness in his English verses, and one would rather send him back to his "mammy-language" than encourage him in his stepmother-tongue, were it not for the reflection that the latter enables him to reach a far wider audience, and that he really has something to say in it.

I mentioned Longfellow of set purpose to head off the superior critic. Nobody can be more conscious than I of the commonplace measures in which Mr Raskin sings and the naïve thoughts which he sets to his homely music. His is not even that simplicity which has been defined as the last refuge of the complex. It is the art which scarcely conceals artlessness. But I am not at all sure I do not prefer it to the artfulness which smothers sense. Not long ago I heard the last of the Victorian critics, Mr Edmund Gosse—with a depth of thought and a polished diction which few Georgians would waste

on an after-dinner speech—discourse upon the future of poetry. He looked forward, not altogether hospitably, to an ever-increasing complexity of form and matter, the poet in his search for the unjaded being reduced to distorting his impressions and torturing his phrases. And, unquestionably, the temptation to seek novelty at the cost of veracity and simplicity must grow with the growth of the thesaurus of poetry. In all the arts we see the weight of the past urging the young generation to a desperate strain after originality—to a futurism that is unlikely ever to have a past.

The Yiddish poet is fortunately saved, both by his inacquaintance with the more recondite slopes of Parnassus, and by his peculiar heritage of national pain, from delving too deeply for his material or moulding it too tortuously. His childhood has provided him with that store of glamorous memories inherent in a ritualistic and domesticated religion; his youth has known the struggle between the old culture and the new, often intensified by exile; his manhood is richly endowed with miseries of body and spirit, and, above all—if the discipline of suffering be necessary to the doctrine of song—he is the son of a persecuted and homeless race, which is half-martyr, half-Philistine, half-superman, half-bagman—a strange mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous. Is it wonderful if his songs reflect all this tragi-comic medley, if they hesitate between a sigh and a tear, and if the sigh, when it comes, is as much of self-contempt as of self-pity? These traits are more or less common to all the ghetto poets; they are but glorified in Heine.

Perhaps of all contemporary poets Mr W. H. Davies comes nearest Mr Raskin in simplicity. But how complex is our ghetto poet in comparison! Mr Davies has only himself to express, the adventures of a soul on the tramp—he has not, like Mr Raskin, the vast background of a national tragedy. He has no “great far-off divine event” to yearn for or to despair of. Nor does he possess the psychological disunity of our Russian Jew, whose work affords a happy hunting-ground for the student of dual personality, quite apart from the possession of two tongues, which is already to possess two souls. Mr Raskin, like Whitman, does not mind contradicting himself. And there are in his talent all sorts of curious streaks, just as there are unexpected deviations from the monotony of his metres. You will find in the second part of his book strange reminders of seventeenth-century poets, weavers of *concetti* and confectioners of love-lyrics, whom it is certain he has never read. *My Heart*, for example, might have been written by a more sardonic Carew. As for *To You*, I can even imagine Browning writing it—in a peculiarly lucid moment. But whatever reception the good British public—who loved not Browning either—accord to these verses, it is pleasant to think that the author has his own racial following, and that his work will not go unread, or worse! unpurchased. Nor do I think the general reader can read it without profit, even though he be too critical for pleasure.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

MY sincere thanks are due to the proprietors of *The Jewish Chronicle* and *The Jewish World* for kind permission to reprint several poems that have appeared in these journals; to my dear friend the Rev. M. Abrahams, B.A., for his valuable advice and assistance; to my friends Mr S. Phillips, M.A., Mr B. Libbish, B.A., and to Mr Maurice Myers for kindly undertaking the revision of the manuscript for the press; and, above all, to one of the greatest literary men of our age, Mr Israel Zangwill, the value of whose sympathy and encouragement I can better feel than express.

P. M. R.





## CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE AUTUMN RAIN . . . . .	I
MY BIRTH-PLACE . . . . .	2
THE STRANGER . . . . .	4
THE WANDERER . . . . .	5
A HEBREW MELODY . . . . .	8
THE LOTUS PLANT . . . . .	8
THE INTRUDER . . . . .	11
A PRAYER . . . . .	14
THE MIRACLE . . . . .	17
THE ETERNAL RIDDLE . . . . .	19
A GHETTO MUSICIAN . . . . .	21
ISAIAH'S VISION . . . . .	23
THE JEWISH CHILD . . . . .	25
TWO ANGELS . . . . .	26
MESSIAH . . . . .	28
RABBI AND PRINCESS . . . . .	30
ANTI-SEMITISM , , . . .	31



# CONTENTS

xv

---

	PAGE
A DREAM . . . . .	72
A PLEDGE . . . . .	73
TWO SORROWS . . . . .	74
MY HEART . . . . .	74
VALE . . . . .	75
I ASKED THE STARS . . . . .	76
CHILDREN . . . . .	78
A RAY . . . . .	79
MY MOTHER'S SONG . . . . .	80
THE DYING POET . . . . .	81
DISILLUSION . . . . .	83
MY FAITH . . . . .	84
HARP AND SWORD . . . . .	86



## SONGS OF A JEW

### THE AUTUMN RAIN

DRIPPING, drizzling Autumn rain,  
Beating on my window-pane,  
From my window on the ground—  
How monotonous a sound !  
Drip-drip-drip, and drop-drop-drop—  
Long, long hours without a stop ;  
Dripping, drizzling, beating fast,  
Telling stories of my past,  
Bringing memories again,  
Cold and dismal as the rain,  
Cold and dismal as the truth  
Of my childhood, of my youth,  
That arrived and passed away  
Like a drizzling Autumn day.

Drip-drip-drip and drop-drop-drop,  
All day long without a stop!  
Drizzle, drip, and tell me more—  
What my future has in store.  
Tell, I pray you, like a friend,  
Will my Autumn ever end?  
What! foretell you exile, pain!  
Nothing new, O foolish rain!  
Exile is my People's nurse,  
From our cradle to our hearse.  
Drip-drip-drip, and drop-drop-drop,  
All day long without a stop.  
Can you tell no other thing?  
Better stop, so I may sing;  
Sing the life-song of a Jew—  
I can sadlier sing than you.

### MY BIRTH-PLACE

NOT in frolic, joy, and freedom,  
Is, O friend, my childhood gone;  
In the place my mother bore me,  
Sun of freedom never shone.

There, my friend, where every life-beam  
Is in clouds of death concealed,  
Where Cain's brand "Be strange and wander"  
On each human brow is sealed.

Where men come and go like shadows,  
Pray, and fast, and toil, and slave,  
Life on earth devoutly crushing  
For a dream beyond the grave.

Where of earthly life despairing,  
Men in vain to heaven look;  
Where man's heart and soul are buried  
In the pages of a book.

Where man's thought for ever hovers,  
In a lifeless space of gloom,  
Where the brightest youth is youthless,  
Fairest plants fade ere they bloom.

In the ghetto, friend, the ghetto,  
Where all hopes at birth decay,  
There my mother bore and nursed me,  
There my childhood passed away.

## THE STRANGER

OPEN, child, your wicket,  
Let me in, I pray;  
Tired am I from wand'ring,  
Long is still my way.

What my name is, ask you?  
Why reveal my shame?  
On my long, long journey  
I forgot my name.

Wonder you I come by  
This unbeaten track?  
Storm, by chance, has brought me,  
Storm will take me back.

And the land I come from?  
Oh, in ev'ry part  
You will find the traces  
Of my wounded heart.

Why without a torchlight  
In a night so dark?  
Tempests in the desert  
Quenched it, spark by spark.



Have I any friends here ?

Many a one and none ;

None, when I am with them,

Many, when I am gone.

And the land I go to ?

That would mean a goal ;

There's no land nor people

Stays my restless soul.

Everywhere a native,

Everywhere a guest ;

All I pray and crave for

Is a moment's rest.

## THE WANDERER

WITH my wanderer's staff in hand

Tramping thus from land to land,

Nowhere finding home and rest

For my wounded, weary breast.

Ever hearing all day long

Ev'rywhere the same old song :

Round the earth, and to and fro—

Ever go !

Go, no clime must you allure,

Go, you are too rich, too poor,

Go, you are too weak, too strong,

Go along !

Brother dear, oh, dost thou know—

*Where* to go ?

Go from North—for life's sake go ;

Go from West—for our sake, go ;

Go from here—you seem too pale ;

Go from there—you look too frail ;

Go, you are too weak, too bold,

Go, you are too young, too old,

Go—too simple, go—too clever,

Go for ever !

Here a peril, there a danger,

Ev'rywhere, a stranger, stranger,

Ev'rywhere, all men among—

Go along !

Brother dear, oh, dost thou know—

*Where* to go ?

Friends who feel my pain and shame  
Bid me back to whence I came,  
To the clime that drove me least,  
Bid me seek the East, the East.  
There, they say, I'll refuge find,  
There, they say, the skies are kind,  
There I'll rest my weary head,  
Plough my field, and eat my bread.  
There I'll rest and there I'll toil,  
Sow the seed, and love the soil ;  
Where my fathers lived and died—  
There my new life should be tried.  
But my elder brothers say :  
All the world I would betray !  
Go to East—oh, what a whim !  
Go to East—oh, what a dream !  
And my elder brothers say—  
Stay away !  
    Brother dear, oh, dost thou know—  
    *Where* to go ?

## A HEBREW MELODY

YOU comfort me that I am living,  
While mighty nations were effaced,  
But tell me, dearest, which is nobler,  
A freeman's death or life disgraced?

Two brothers lived ; one killed the other ;  
Repose in grave found he who died ;  
But I, like Cain, am doomed to wander,  
And Abel's rest I am denied.

"Go on and dwell," I hear an echo,  
"Removed from earth, remote from sky ;  
And strange alike to man and angel,  
You dare not live, you shall not die!"

## THE LOTUS PLANT

OF the lotus plant a story  
Comes to us from ancient time,  
Those who tasted of its flower  
Soon forgot their native clime.

In the East there is a country,  
Where my People's star once shone ;  
Since it set in utter blackness  
Centuries have come and gone ;

But I cannot yet forget it  
Though I roam the earth around,  
For that precious Lotus flower  
I have nowhere, nowhere found ;

And my native, ancient country  
Ever looms before my eyes,  
With its hills and plains and gardens,  
With its deep and sapphire skies.

With its lily-spangled valleys,  
Groves of cedar, palm, and vine,  
With its sacred sites where erstwhile  
Trod the fathers of our line.

Ev'ry sunbeam, bird, and flower  
To my vision ever brings  
Hills and valleys that have cradled  
Heroes, prophets, bards, and kings.

But a lorn, sequestered stranger,  
Lo! I wander through the West,  
Ever dreaming, ever longing,  
Never finding peace or rest.

Of my kindred I make question,  
While from land to land I roam ;  
“ You that tasted of the Lotus,  
And in Exile made your home ;

“ Can you tell me, happy people,  
Can you tell me in what part  
Grows that blessèd magic flower  
That shall heal my pining heart ? ”

But they gaze at me in wonder,  
Shake their heads and turn away ;  
And they mock me as a dreamer,  
And I plod my lonely way.

In what Gilead their balm grew,  
They keep hidden from my quest ;  
So I pine, I pine for homeland,  
With no plant to give me rest

## THE INTRUDER

ONCE in my secluded chamber,  
Late at night I read  
Israel's ancient, wondrous story ;  
How he shone, and shed  
Light around him—in his homeland  
Thriving free and great. . . .  
Then my thoughts passed slowly onward  
To his present fate.

Israel, homeless, footsore, captive,  
Into exile goes,  
And the world has long forgotten  
What to him it owes.  
“Gentile World ! you have polluted  
Springs from which you drank.”  
In such sad recriminations,  
On my couch I sank.

. . . . .  
Stealthily an old man entered  
My secluded room ;  
On his breast a cross suspended,  
In his eyes, deep gloom.

" You accused me, and I answer :  
Yours, not mine, the blame,  
For your exile, for your downfall,  
For your grief and shame.

" Not I, no, but you polluted  
Your eternal spring ;  
Home and faith and pride abandoned,  
And to exile cling.

" You it is at alien altars  
Kneel to alien gods ;  
You who, as in cast-off garments,  
Deal in cast-off thoughts.

" Gather crumbs from strangers' tables,  
Colder crumbs than stone.  
And you glory that you have no  
Table of your own.

" Faith and truth and pride—all treasures,  
You have prized of old ;  
For a lentil-pottage long since  
You your birthright sold.



“ You no longer feel the horror  
Of a slave’s disgrace ;  
Do you ask me to respect you,  
Honour such a race ?

“ You of old had heroes, prophets,  
Noble, great, and true ;  
How much of their daring spirit  
Is there left in you ?

“ Maccabeans as your forebears  
In your boast you claim ;  
If they knew their grandsons—they would  
Die again—of shame !

“ Dead is all your pride and valour,  
Dead your sacred tongue ;  
Speech of bards and kings and prophets  
To oblivion flung.

“ And your home that waits deserted  
Do you e’er recall ?  
Where are all your rich and mighty,  
Mammon’s high priests all ?

“Like deserters they are sailing  
Under foreign flags ;  
Lackeys, who their masters' mantles  
Wear—to hide their rags.

“Crumbs of bread and beggars' lodging—  
Dare no more expect !  
No, a race that loses honour—  
No one can respect !

“Now goodbye, and cease to blame me  
For your shame and yoke.”

“Stay !” I shrieked, “I wish to answer !  
Stay !”—and I awoke.

### A PRAYER

GOD, I pray Thee, grant Thy people,  
Just their daily bread ;  
Not the bread of strife and friction,  
Not the bread of sad affliction,  
Tearless daily bread ;

Not the bread by slaves desired,  
Not the bread by shame acquired,  
Honest daily bread ;  
That they may no longer gather,  
Crumbs from wealthy tables—Father,  
Give their daily bread !

God, I pray Thee, grant Thy people,  
Courage, heart, and strength ;  
Not the strength, like tempest rushing,  
On its way all wrecking, crushing—  
Noble heart and strength ;  
That in Man's inhuman battle,  
They may not, like driven cattle,  
Slaughtered be at length ;  
That they may be self-depending,  
That they may be self-defending,  
God, oh, give them strength !

God, I pray Thee, grant Thy people,  
Just a little pride ;  
Not the pride that severs brothers,  
Seeing only faults in others—  
True and noble pride ;

That their young, and brave, and healthy,  
That their wise, and strong, and wealthy,  
    Drift not with the tide ;  
That whate'er in life their stations,  
Theirs be noble aspirations—  
    God, oh, give them pride !

God, I pray Thee, grant Thy people,  
    Shelter and a home ;  
Not a home that swords acquire,  
Not a home of blood and fire,  
    Just a peaceful home ;  
That they may not ever wander,  
Torn and rent in parts asunder,  
    Tramp the earth and roam ;  
That their bond be never shattered,  
That they be no longer scattered—  
    God, oh, bring them home !

## THE MIRACLE

THE Rebbe tells his old, old tale,  
The pupils seated round.  
“. . . And thus, my boys, no holy oil  
In Temple could be found.

“The heathens left no oil to light  
The Lord’s eternal lamp ;  
At last one jar, one single jar,  
Was found with High Priest’s stamp.

“Its oil could only last one day—  
But God hath wondrous ways ;  
For lo ! a miracle occurred :  
It burned for eight whole days.”

The tale was ended, but the boys,  
All open-eyed and dumb,  
Sat listening still, as though aware  
Of stranger things to come.

“Just wait, my boys, permit me, pray,  
The liberty to take ;  
Your Rebbe—may he pardon me—  
Has made a slight mistake.

“Not eight days, but two thousand years  
That jar of oil did last,  
To quell its wondrous flames availed  
No storm, no flood, no blast.

“But this is not yet all, my boys,  
The miracle just starts.  
This flame is kindling light and hope  
In countless gloomy hearts.

“And in our long and starless night,  
Lest we should go astray,  
It, beacon-like, sheds floods of light,  
And eastwards points our way.

“Where light will shine on Zion's hill,  
As in the days of old.

. . . . .

The miracle is greater, boys,  
Than what your Rebbe told.”

## THE ETERNAL RIDDLE

ISRAEL, my People,  
God's greatest riddle,  
Will thy solution  
Ever be told ?

Fought—never conquered,  
Bent—never broken,  
Mortal—immortal,  
Youthful, though old.

Egypt enslaved thee,  
Babylon crushed thee,  
Rome led thee captive,  
Homeless thy head.

Where are those nations  
Mighty and fearsome ?  
Thou hast survived them,  
They are long dead.

Nations keep coming,  
Nations keep going,  
Passing like shadows,  
    Wiped off the earth.

Thou an eternal  
Witness remainest,  
Watching their burial,  
    Watching their birth.

Pray, who revealed thee  
Heaven's great secret :  
Death and destruction  
    Thus to defy ?

Suffering torture,  
Stake, Inquisition—  
Prithee, who taught thee  
    Never to die ?

Ay, and who gave thee  
Faith, deep as ocean,  
Strong as the rock-hills,  
    Fierce as the sun ?



---

Hated and hunted,  
Ever to wander,  
Bearing a message—  
God is but One!

Pray, has thy saga  
Likewise an ending,  
As its beginning  
Glorious of old?

Israel, my People,  
God's greatest riddle,  
Will thy solution  
Ever be told?

## A GHETTO MUSICIAN

THE hall was bright, the guests were gay,  
In festal garb arrayed ;  
Unheeded by the piano sat  
A gloomy dark-eyed maid.

It seemed as though the piano smiled,  
With dazzling milk-white teeth ;  
The maiden touched it, and it wept,  
Her fingers swift beneath.

And straight a sudden thrill of grief,  
Passed through the feasting throng,  
And old and young were bowed before  
The pathos of her song.

I knew the player, knew her race,  
Her birthplace and Belief ;  
I knew the music of her soul,  
Her wordless song of grief.

The soul that treasured in its depths  
The drama of a race ;  
The song a distant ghetto nursed—  
Her dismal native place.

Of vanished hopes, of buried dreams,  
Complained her sad, sweet song ;  
What brought—I mused—this child of grief  
To this gay, feasting throng ?

No answer came ; a spell-bound crowd  
    Stood motionless around ;  
Eyes dimmed with tears, hearts beating fast,  
    Still sought each magic sound.

## ISAIAH'S VISION

THREE thousand years ago,  
    The Hebrew Prophet's soul,  
Through countless ages saw,  
    The far-off human goal.

When life was base and vile,  
    And chained was human thought,  
He to a heathen world,  
    A godly message brought.

“ A time will come when man,”  
    Proclaimed the noble seer,<sup>™</sup>  
“ To plough shall turn his sword,  
    To pruning-hook his spear,

“ His field of fire and blood—  
    To field of golden corn ;  
In human heart new love,  
    New glory shall be born.

“ And nations all to peace  
    Shall give their mind and heart,  
And lift no sword, nor learn,  
    The godless martial art.”

. . . . .  
Three thousand years have passed ;  
    And though the Prophet's dream  
May yet be unattained,  
    And force still reigns supreme ;

The Prophet's people prove  
    To men the human goal :  
That mightier than the sword  
    Is heart, and mind, and soul.

That mightier than the sword  
    Is God's eternal word.  
The Prophet's people live  
    In spite of fire and sword,

## THE JEWISH CHILD

HE is a child, and yet he is  
Much older than his years ;  
He laughs, but in his laugh is oft  
More sadness than in tears.

He frisks and sports, but, 'mid his pranks,  
He stares—and in his face  
You read, as in an open book,  
The drama of his race.

And in his deep, dark, sparkling eyes  
You see his people's doom.  
They mirror both bright eastern skies,  
And northern mist and gloom.

He plays, he capers like a child,  
But oft it seems to you  
That in a moment he will grow  
A grey, a wandering Jew.

He frolics, but his very glee  
With pathos is entwined ;  
He's child and man, he's young and old,  
He's joy and gloom combined.

## TWO ANGELS

EVERY Friday when the West  
Lures the golden sun to rest,  
And the gloomy earth to cheer,  
Diamond stars in sky appear.  
When Queen Sabbath comes on earth,  
Bringing Heaven's joy and mirth,  
Week-worn workers' toil to end—  
Angels two from sky descend.  
Angels two—one kind and bright,  
But the other—dark as night.  
And around the world they soar,  
Halting at each Jewish door.  
When their eyes lit candles meet,  
When bright faces Sabbath greet,  
When sweet songs, and anthems fair  
Show that Peace hath banished care,

Anger, and the daily grind—  
Then the Angel mild and kind  
Utters blessings : " Like to-night  
Ever shall your life be bright ;  
Never, never, shall you miss,  
Soul's contentment, deepest bliss."  
And his mate, with gloomy eyes,  
" Amen " to his words replies.  
But when they a household see  
Void of joy, of Sabbath glee,  
Not a candle, not a spark,  
Room and faces sad and dark,  
Work and strife and Satan's wiles,  
Then the evil Angel smiles,  
And he hastes to speak his curse :  
" Ever go from bad to worse,  
Every day and all life through  
Peace shall be denied to you."  
And his mate, with tearful eyes,  
" Amen " says—and sadly cries.

## MESSIAH

## (A TALMUDIC LEGEND)

AND Daniel begged the Angel of the Lord :  
“ Oh, tell me, pray, of that Salvation true,  
Jehovah will unto His people bring,  
So that my soul may rest and tranquil be.”  
And thus the Angel spoke and made reply :  
“ On that great day Messiah, Judah’s King,  
Will mount His flag upon the Zion Hill,  
On that great day the Temple will be built,  
By Judah’s foe no more to be destroyed.  
That day Messiah, God’s annointed King,  
With Him Elijah, Judah’s prophet true,  
The holy Mount of Olives will ascend,  
And King to prophet thus will give command :  
‘ Arise, O Tishbite, sound thy clarion high !’  
And as the clarion peals the earth will wake,  
A light more brilliant and more dazzling still,  
Than when Jehovah first created light,  
Will shine, and clothe the earth from end to end.  
The sick and grieved that light will heal and cheer,



And when once more the trumpet's peals are heard,  
The dead will wake, and, rising from their tombs,  
Shake off the clods that kept them cold and dumb.  
And friend will cheer and glad the heart of friend,  
And mother will embrace with joy her child,  
And from the East and West, and North and South,  
They, swiftly brought, as on an eagle's wings,  
Will flock, and to Messiah wend their way.  
And thus the joyous message will be spread :  
' The day has come the Lord designed of yore,  
Let all rejoice, let all be glad this day.'  
And when again the trumpet's sound is heard,  
The Lord, surrounded by His Angel troops,  
In light and glory will appear on earth.  
And when once more the prophet's trumpet sounds,  
The hills and mounts will sink, the valleys rise ;  
And where the Tabor once and Carmel Hill,  
And where the Olive Mount and Hermon stood,  
A flowery plain will far and wide extend,  
And then the Lord His Angels will command,  
To raise once more the Temple's golden gates  
The earth kept buried in its entrails vast,  
Since Judah's foe the holy fane destroyed."

## RABBI AND PRINCESS

(FROM THE TALMUD)

"RABBI," said a heathen princess  
To a Hebrew chief;  
"You a man so wise—how can you  
Follow your belief,  
When your God, the great Jehovah,  
Acted like a thief?"

"For he cast a sleep on Adam,  
And, without his leave,  
Took a rib from out his body,  
Made the woman Eve.  
Rabbi, in such wise act only  
Robbers—I believe."

"Princess," said the Rabbi, "if you,  
Wish to judge aright,  
Just permit me to relate you  
What occurred one night,  
When a man my chamber entered,  
Hid from people's sight.

“ In my isolated cottage,  
Up the barren wold,  
I possessed a lamp of copper,  
Tarnished, bent, and old,  
And he stole it. . . . But instead he  
Left a lamp of gold.

“ Tell me, was this man a robber,  
Can he thus be named ? ”  
“ No ! he was your benefactor ! ”  
She, surprised, exclaimed ;  
Then, the Rabbi's smile beholding,  
Turned and blushed, half-shamed.

## ANTI-SEMITISM

(AFTER THE TALMUD)

WHEN the Persian Haman  
Thrilled and throbbed with joy,  
At the gladsome prospect,  
Israel to destroy ;

Satan, likewise joyful,  
Brought to God the news,  
Bade Him sign the verdict,  
To destroy the Jews.

The Almighty answered,  
"Thy request is good,  
But my seal, ere signing,  
Must be dipped in blood.

"Bring some human blood, then,  
Shed by Jewish hands."  
Forthwith sped old Satan  
Over seas and lands,

Searching every highway,  
Every cave and wood ;  
But, alas, he could not  
Find such human blood.

Then to God returning,  
Carried back the tale :  
"Cowards are Thy people,  
And of heart too frail."

## DAVID'S HARP

(DEDICATED TO MY DEAR FRIEND  
DR CHARLES WEIZMANN)

A harp hangs in David's bed-chamber, and every midnight a south wind breathes upon it, and its strings play of themselves.— (“Berachoth,” p. 3).

As the silver moon, in climbing  
In a summer night the crystal  
Walls of heaven through the cloudland,  
Casts its mellow, dreamy moonbeams  
On the paths and roads deserted,  
On the Temples and the Castles,  
Dreaming like enchanted giants  
By the watching ghost-like shadows ;—  
Thus in memory arising  
Sometimes through life's sombre cloudland  
Images long, long forgotten,  
Charming sagas, ancient legends,  
Stories quaint I heard in childhood  
From my Rebbe in my Cheder,

Cast their tender light, illuming  
The deserted, gloomy chambers  
Of my grief-encompassed heart.

In the chamber of King David,  
Of Jerusalem's great Ruler,  
Hangs an old, a golden harp.  
Night by night, at the hour of midnight,  
When all mortals rest in slumber,  
And all Angels hymns are chanting,  
Blows a south breeze, softly touching  
With its breath the strings the golden,  
And the harp, as though by magic,  
Of itself begins to play.  
Soon the King those sounds awaken ;  
Swiftly from his couch he rises,  
Through the night, until the sunrise,  
Chants his wondrous psalms and hymns.  
And those songs possess a power,  
A great hidden, sacred power,  
Which reverberates their echo  
In each human heart and spirit,  
And they pierce the hearts of mortals,

---

Drawing from the depths of feeling,  
All the pearls and all the corals  
Of emotion and of thought.

Midnight peals. Unearthly music,  
Fills the chamber of King David,  
Melodies in which the singer  
Hears the voice of God and Nature,  
Sometimes speaking through the breezes,  
Sometimes through the howling tempest ;  
Sometimes like a streamlet flowing,  
Sometimes raging like the sea. . . .

Oft a mighty voice arises,  
Like a fiery thunder rolling  
O'er the wide Arabian desert ;  
Like the wild Simoon, unfettered,  
Yelling in its angry effort  
To uproot the hoary cedars  
Of King Lebanon the snow-crowned.  
Like the Red Sea's heaving bosom,  
Tossed and tumbled by the tempest,  
Vale-like sinking, mount-like rising,

As it foams, and yawns, and threatens  
To engulf the rocks above it.  
Then the poet's psalms re-echo  
Voices angry as the tempest.

"He layeth the beams of his chambers  
In the waters,  
He walketh upon the wings  
Of the wind ;  
At the voice of thy thunder they haste away,  
They go up like mountains,  
They go down like valleys,"  
Yea, the roaring waves and thunder  
Then his songs reverberate.

Oft a melody starts flowing,  
Soft and calm like the Shiloah,  
Gently rolling lucent billows  
To the velvet shore, caressing,  
Wooing tenderly the willows,  
Like the ripple of the far off  
Murmuring fountains of En-gedi,  
Like the whisper of the young ears



---

In the cornfields of Bethlehem,  
When the spring breeze lulls to rest ;  
Then the singer's strain re-echoes  
Natures voices sweet and tender :

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,  
He leadeth me beside the still waters."

And the music of the harp-strings,  
And the words sublime and charming  
Fuse into one wondrous hymn.

Oft a melody upsurges  
Full of immemorial sorrow,  
Like the speechless supplication  
Of a lone forsaken soul.  
Of a soul that gropes in darkness,  
Seeing no escape, no outlet  
From its melancholy fate ;  
Like the sob of stricken parents,  
Watching hopelessly the death-bed  
Of their only darling child.  
Then the singer, gravely, sadly,  
Sings his melancholy song :

“The pains of death encompass me,  
The woes of grave got hold upon me,  
I found but grief and woe,”  
And the echo of his strain is  
Through the night a thrill of grief.

Oft a melody awakens,  
Flowing like a sacred prayer,  
Like a love-dream first unfolding  
In the pure heart of a maiden,  
Raising feelings undefined yet,  
Yearnings, hopes till then unknown ;  
Like a quaint, mysterious vision,  
Woven in a poet's fancy,  
Carrying him, as though by magic,  
On the wings of inspiration,  
Into spheres from mortals hidden,  
Into spheres of boundless beauty  
To a space of light and rapture,  
Charming vistas, wondrous views.  
There the singer hears a chorus  
Of angelic hosts in heaven,  
Chanting, glorifying, praising  
The Creator of the worlds,

And the singer joins the chorus,  
To the sound of magic harp-strings :

“Praise Him, praise Him, all ye angels,  
Praise Him all ye hosts of light,  
Praise Him Heavens of the Heavens,  
Every soul shall praise the Lord.”

Nightly thus the harp starts playing,  
Nightly thus the King starts singing  
Songs of rest and songs of tempest,  
Of life's joys, and of life's burdens,  
Man's despair, his hopes and longings,  
Songs of Nature and of God—  
All the deepest heart-emotions,  
All most sacred aspirations  
Are re-echoed in his songs.

Thus the twins by song begotten—  
Speech of heart and sound of Heaven—  
Have presented world and mankind  
With the Psalter—Book of Life,  
And the echo of that life-book  
Ever hovers in the world-space  
Over hill, and dell, and desert,

In the prince's gorgeous palace,  
In the pauper's gloomy cottage,  
Every human heart it touches  
It entrances and inspires us,  
Fills with thoughts and yearnings great.

Ages come and go. . . . Like actors  
On the stage appearing, changing,  
On the earth—the stage of mankind—  
Countries, nations ever change.

Ages come and go ; but one thing  
One, alas ! remains for ever—  
Strife and struggle unabated,  
'Twixt the races, faiths, and nations.

Men have never yet discovered  
How between them (fateful secret !)  
Earth and heaven should be shared,  
Yet amid the wild confusion,  
And the chaos of man's conflicts,  
When God's reason sobers mankind  
Of its war intoxication,  
And a momentary truce is  
On the battlefield proclaimed—  
Then in synagogues, cathedrals,

---

And in churches, and in cloisters,  
And wherever man, repentant,  
Lifts his troubled soul in prayer,  
Magic sounds ascend the heavens,  
Songs that stream from sacred fountains  
In the human soul deep hidden,  
And they ease life's heavy burdens,  
Bringing comfort, help, and peace.  
Listen to those words and music,  
Whosoever, friend, you may be,  
You will recognise these songs.  
Still King David's harp is chiming,  
Still its strings remain unbroken,  
Still unsilenced are its echoes,  
While the ages come and go,  
Everlasting and eternal  
Is it, like man's living spirit,  
Like the firmament above us,  
Like the people of the King.

Israel, Glorious are thy legends  
And they are of thee a portion ;  
For thy legends still are living,  
And thy life—a legend still.

## THE SEDER

## I

COTTAGES whitewashed,  
And cosy and neat,  
Smilingly waiting  
The spring feast to meet.

Happy-faced children  
At play here and there,  
Perfume and freshness  
Of spring in the air.

## II

Bashfully blushing,  
The sun, like a bride,  
Goes down in crimson  
In Westland to hide.

Fair is the twilight,  
And fragrant and still—  
Little by little  
The synagogues fill.

One by one kindle  
The night's gleaming eyes :  
Candles in windows,  
And stars in the skies.

## III

Ended in *Shul* is  
The service divine ;  
Seder is started  
With legends and wine.  
Father is blessing  
The night of all nights,  
All that are hungry  
To feast he invites.

" All that are homeless  
Yet masters shall be,  
Slaves who are this year—  
The next shall be free ! "

Children ask " questions "   
And father replies,   
Playfully sparkle  
The wine and the eyes.

Hymns of redemption  
All merrily sing,  
Queen is each mother,  
Each father—a king.

## IV

Midnight, the Seder  
Is come to an end.  
Guardian angels  
From heaven descend.  
  
Each one a message  
Of liberty brings,  
Scattering blessings  
Of peace from his wings.

## V

Fast asleep the townlet,  
The field and the lake,  
Only the full moon  
Above is awake,  
Shedding its tender,  
Its silvery light,  
Guarding God's chosen,  
God's People to-night.



## THE FEAST OF WEEKS

WE have an ancient custom  
    Surviving from the East,  
To decorate our dwellings  
    With flowers for the feast.

How quaint is this old custom  
    From East to exile brought ;  
But why does it awaken  
    In me such gloomy thought ?

I see the flower-bearers  
    'Mid ghetto's rush and strife,  
And in my mind is woven  
    A dream of vanished life.

A land with fair green pastures  
    Is in my vision born,  
And palm and cedar forests,  
    And fields of golden corn,

And mountains trimmed with olives,  
And vales with lilies decked,  
And peasants strong and happy,  
With heart and head erect.

Each garden and each vineyard  
In tones of plenty speaks,  
Rich nature celebrating  
Its glorious Feast of Weeks.

The men like stately cedars,  
The women tall as palms,  
Their festal hymns are chanting—  
Their wondrous pretty psalms.

And children gay and merry  
Arrive in fair array,  
Luxuriant laurels bearing  
In honour of the day.

. . . . .

The phantom views are vanished ;  
Around, alas, I see  
A sordid, gloomy ghetto—  
No sign of field or tree.

I see through busy alleys  
A Jew his flowers bring  
To decorate his dwelling  
In memory of spring.

Oh, long has he forgotten  
His fair, his native home ;  
In exile he has learned  
From town to town to roam.

No longer a Judean—  
A weary exiled Jew,  
In Ghetto he is praying  
For harvest, rain, and dew.

I see him bent and weary ;  
O God, how sad it is !  
How long will he pluck flowers  
From fields that are not his ?

And prayingly I murmur,  
O Israel's Rock and Shield,  
Bring back Thy ancient people  
To garden, wood, and field.

Let them revive the custom,  
Fair custom of the East—  
With flowers from *their* gardens  
To celebrate their feast.

### CHANUCAH LIGHTS

I KINDLED my eight little candles,  
My Chanukah candles—and lo!  
Fair visions and dreams half-forgotten  
Were rising of years long ago.

I musingly gazed at my candles,  
Meseemed in their quivering flames  
In golden, in fiery letters  
I read the old glorious names,

The names of our heroes immortal,  
The noble, the brave, and the true ;  
A battlefield saw I in vision  
Where many were conquered by few ;

And mute lay the Syrian army,  
Judea's proud foe—in the field ;  
And Judas the brave Maccabaeus  
I saw in his helmet and shield.

His eyes shone like bright stars of heaven,  
Like music resounded his voice :  
“ Brave comrades, we fought and we conquered,  
Now let us in God's name rejoice !

“ We conquered—but know, my brave comrades,  
No triumph is due to the sword ;  
Remember our motto and watchword,  
‘ For People and Towns of the Lord. ’ ”

He spoke, and from all the four corners  
An echo repeated each word ;  
The woods and the mountains re-echoed,  
“ For People and Towns of the Lord.”

And swiftly the message spread, calling :  
“ Judea, Judea is free !  
Re-kindled the lamp in the Temple,  
Re-kindled each bosom with glee ! ”

. . . . .

My Chanukah candles soon flickered,  
Around me was darkness of night ;  
But deep in my soul I felt shining,  
A heavenly-wonderful light.

## THE LAST

(AFTER THE HEBREW)

THIS the key of Thy Temple's Gates  
Into my hands Thou gavest, saying :  
" I make thee watchman o'er my House,  
A watchman, and a master too ;  
And thou shalt watch my holy House.  
And open wide its gates  
To those who knock at them,  
With yearning heart. . . ."  
And I—I faithfully kept watch,  
And day and night did wait  
For parchèd men to come  
And drink the water of Thy blessed Spring.  
The key with rust is covered in my hand.  
I heard a gossip and a noise around,  
But none enquired for the House of God.

Alone Thy gates I opened,  
Alone I stood and prayed,  
And to myself I said  
'Tis time to close.  
And, growing old, and grey, and frail,  
I breathed my last prayer,  
And in the dusty curtain of the ark  
I lapped my head and wept aloud,  
For great was my disgrace.  
And when Thy House, O God, I left,  
I saw the last dark shadows creep  
And follow in my steps.

## A HEBREW MELODY

THE sky-larks sing to me  
A song of mirth and glee,  
I feel their airy gladness—  
They soar so high and free.  
Oh, singers in the sky,  
If but to you could I  
Pour out my inner sadness,  
You would not sing, but cry.

## THE HEBREW

YOU bid me to bury my sorrows,  
And cease o'er my burdens to rave.  
But where shall I find on this planet  
As vast as my sorrows a grave?

## THE FIRST SNOW

FAIRY-LIKE on earth advancing,  
All transforming, all entrancing,  
Playing on their way and dancing,  
Soil-untarnished yet.

Silver stars from sky are dropping,  
Little fairies skipping, hopping,  
On the roofs and turrets popping,  
Crowns with diamonds set.

Greeting Nature's silver wedding,  
Argent splendour they are shedding,  
And a bridal veil outspreading  
Like a silver net.



Till town-alleys foul and tainted,  
Turn cathedral-aisles ensainted,  
Carved with gorgeous ermine-painted  
Ornamental fret.

How all changed by elfin power !  
Every house—a magic tower,  
Every tree with lilac-flower  
Lures like a coquette.

Following in their magic traces,  
Hidden joy each heart embraces,  
Sparkling eyes and brightened faces  
Everywhere are met.

How I love you, white-robed city,  
Maiden-pure, and maiden-pretty !  
But my love is—what a pity !—  
Tempered with regret.

Truer lover you would find me,  
If you were not to remind me  
Of a cold land left behind me  
That I'd fain forget.

## BY NIGHT

THE night is fair, the night is still,  
God's spirit soars o'er vale and hill ;  
I dream again fair childhood's dreams,  
The world a temple is, meseems,  
The beaming silver moon in sky,  
Its lamp eternal is on high ;  
And far behind the dots that spark  
There lies concealed a holy ark,  
Of which the sky—its curtain blue—  
Is set with stars—with diamonds true,  
Around on earth, where'er I look,  
I see an open, sacred book,  
Whose every page—each hill and vale—  
Relates a hidden, sacred tale.

The night is still, and on my way  
I hear a congregation pray—  
The crooning streams, the lilting rills,  
The solemn woods, the musing hills.  
Each stalk and blade, each rush and plant,  
Their sacred hymns to heaven chant.

Each tender flower, full of grace,  
In fragrant tones sings heaven's praise.  
O'er field and mead the breeze goes round,  
And carries blessings in its sound.  
In wood and valley, everywhere,  
The sacred music fills the air ;  
The trees, the birds, the waterfall,  
They join the chorus each and all.

On earth an echo hovers round,  
And calls: "This earth is holy ground,  
Which in His mercy He hath blessed."  
And when I heard the voice—I guessed  
That all the longings of my heart  
And I myself are but a part—  
Like ev'rything I hear and see—  
Of Nature's Temple, pure and free.

## IN THE WOOD

I COME to thee, O woodland,  
From town and men to hide,  
To birds, and trees, and flowers,  
My heart-woe to confide.

They were my mates in childhood,  
We know each other well,  
And oft I leave the city  
Among these friends to dwell.

And they in turn cry "Welcome!"  
They greet me with a song :  
" The sky, and air, and sunshine,  
Alike to all belong "—

A truth men have forgotten,  
Or have to study yet,  
Or, is it that they know it,  
And study to forget?

They dole out air and sunshine,  
By race, and creed, and birth ;  
They cannot share God's heaven,  
They cannot share man's earth.

I come to thee, O woodland,  
In search of peace and rest ;  
The greedy town and people  
Begloom my weary breast.

“HOW FAIR . . .”

He who walks by the way . . . and says, “How fair is that tree or that field,” is as if he had forfeited his soul.—“Ethics of the Fathers.”

“WALKING by the way, when spring is  
Bright, and fresh, and mild,  
Say not: Oh, how fair the garden  
Or the field is, child.

“All on earth is vain, remember,  
All has but one goal,  
Saying: Oh, how fair the garden—  
You forego your soul.”

“Rabbi, dear, your words are sacred—  
Truth I can't conceal—  
I say not, How fair the garden,  
But I feel, I feel!

“Feel the breeze that soothes, entrances,  
Like a golden dream;  
Feel the flowers shedding perfume  
In a fragrant stream.

“ Hear the rippling brooklet whisper,  
And its tongue I know ;  
Not a word !—in heart emotions  
Sea-like ebb and flow.

“ Feel the sky—a crystal ocean  
Hanging overhead ;  
Hear on stairs of light in azure,  
Heaven’s angels tread.

“ And I feel my heart with rapture  
Filling to the brim ;  
In a wave of sounds and sunbeams  
I immerse and swim.

“ Then in lap of Mother-Nature,  
Like a child, I sink ;  
From her bosom pure sweet nectar  
Thirstily I drink.

“ Living wonders in the garden  
I see scattered round,  
But remain a silent witness—  
Utter not a sound.

“ Rabbi, dear, your words are sacred—  
Truth I can't conceal ;  
I say not, How fair the garden,  
But I feel, I feel.”

## I SING LIKE A BIRD IN THE SKY

I SING like a bird in the sky,  
Not knowing, not reasoning why ;  
I sing like the breezes in spring,  
I sing when my soul bids me sing.  
Whosoever may start songs and tunes in my heart—  
I sing like a bird in the sky.

I sing like the brook and the stream,  
And free is my heart-woven dream ;  
My song from within is ordained,  
And fountain-like flows unrestrained.  
When with joys or with woes my full heart overflows,  
I sing like the brook and the stream.

I sing like the stars in the night,  
When weaving their motions of light;  
I sing with all Nature around,  
I sing, for to sing I am bound.  
With no aim and no goal, from the soul of my soul,  
I sing like the stars in the night.

### A DEAD BIRD

I WALKED in the wood,  
And the bird-songs I heard,  
So shrill and so sweet,  
And my heart was so stirred!  
Beneath in the grass  
Lay a dead little bird.

I gazed at the bird  
That lay mute on the ground;  
I heard the sweet songs  
That were thrilling around;  
“Dead singer,” I mused,  
“Who now misses thy sound?”



Where be now the sweet tunes  
In the wood thou hast shed ?  
New singers, new notes,  
Have taken thy stead ;  
Who misses his song  
When the singer is dead ?  
My fate, little songster,  
To thine will be like :  
When *my* hour for silence  
Eternal shall strike—  
The song and the singer  
Will vanish alike.

## THE SPRING SKY

I LOVE you, O spring—sky,  
So pure and so mild,  
Your smiles and your tears are  
The moods of a child.  
Your smiles are so beamy,  
Your tears are so pearly,  
I rise in the morning  
To look at you early,

And whether I find that  
    You smile or you cry,  
I cannot but love you  
    O child-looking sky.

### SONGS AND TEARS

IN the depth of my heart,  
    On its grief-riddled bed,  
There are songs yet unsung,  
    There are tears yet unshed.

But the songs and the tears,  
    In one multitude throng,  
Till instead of a tear,  
    Sometimes bursts out a song.

And the sound of a song  
    In my soul when I hear,  
From my heart to my eye  
    Rolls a grief-laden tear.

But at times they combine,  
Flow together along,  
Then I cannot guess which  
Is a tear, which a song.

## I WILL NOT CHANGE

I WILL not change my path with you,  
O worshippers of gold !  
My path is rough, but heaven-lit,  
And yours is smooth, but cold.

In your resplendent halls each night  
The ghost of envy strides,  
Whilst in the castle of my heart  
The living God resides.

My heart is young, though youth is gone ;  
Your hearts in youth are old ;  
I will not change one golden dream  
For all your dreams of gold.

## A SONG

SAY not, child, that in these songs  
    You have read a part  
Of the hopes and dreams that once  
    Filled the singer's heart.

Child, the poet's fairest dreams  
    Reach no mortal ears,  
For the sweetness of his songs  
    Only *his* soul hears.

Of his heart-begotten flame  
    Words are cast-off shades,  
And as rubies shine in rocks,  
    Pearls in ocean glades,

So the poet's deepest dreams,  
    Love, and joy, and pain,  
Unexpressed in mortal words,  
    In his heart remain.

## TO —

WHEN I was young, and strong, and pure,  
I offered you my heart,  
But you declined . . . since then our ways  
Have lain fore'er apart.

My heart was broken. I was left  
Alone on earth to pine :  
My heart was broken, but the shreds—  
Oh, were they yours or mine?

I did not know ; but once I took  
The tiny, crumbling parts,  
And made a song of each . . . my songs  
Are tiny broken hearts. . . .

I sing my song, but do not know  
To whom it should belong :  
It is not yours, it is not mine—  
Pray, who will claim my song?

## BETRAYED

THE night was still and starlit,  
Dumbly I gazed on high ;  
Only the stars in heaven  
Could hear my bosom's sigh.

But the stars betrayed my secret ;  
My sorrow they revealed  
In the sky—to every songbird,  
On earth—to wood and field.

And now each bud in the forest,  
Each fluttering blade and leaf,  
Croons and whispers and babbles  
My jealously-hidden grief.

## A TEAR AND A SMILE

WHEN in your eye I saw a tear,  
You seemed, I know not why,  
A child of purer, higher worlds,  
A daughter of the sky.

---

I loved you, and I told you so ;  
But pardon me, my dear,  
I was misled—I loved not you,  
I merely loved your tear.

For in a while, when to a smile  
Your sparkling eyes gave birth,  
You stood a maid, like maidens all—  
A daughter of the earth.

I felt at once the spell was gone,  
I changed in one short while ;  
The flame you kindled with your tear  
You put out with your smile.

But still, sometimes, I wonder why—  
All chemistry to flout,  
Your humid tear could light a flame,  
Your glowing smile put out.

## THE PROPOSAL

HER I called

“My beaming star.”

“Stars”—she smiled—

“Are old and far.”

When I sunbeams

Called her eyes,

She grew vexed :

“Why look to skies?”

Then I said :

“Your heart is gold.”

“Metals,” she

Replied, “are cold.”

But I named her

“Flower fair.”

“Flowers,” said she,

“Feed on air.”



Then I sighed :

“ My pretty dream.”

“ Dreams,” she laughed,

“ Are things that seem.”

When I bade her

Take my heart,

She arose, and

Did depart.

Then a stranger

Came her way,

Many words he

Did not say,

Neither called her

Gold or pearl,

But he led off

My fair girl.

## A SPRING-NIGHT DREAM

THAT spring night through silver  
We saw the moon sail,  
The sky-princess wearing  
A dream-woven veil.

The sky-princess wearing  
A dream-woven veil,  
She dreamily told us  
Love's wonderful tale—

She dreamily told us  
Love's wonderful tale.  
How sweet was, oh, child, then,  
Thy breath to inhale!

How sweet was, oh, child, then,  
Thy breath to inhale,  
Like nectar of lilies  
That grew down the vale.

Like nectar of lilies  
That grew down the vale,  
The lilies and lovers  
Who'll dare to assail?

"The lilies and lovers  
Who'll dare to assail?"  
Thus sang us each streamlet,  
Each hill, and each dale.

Thus sang us each streamlet,  
Each hill, and each dale,  
But youth is so short, and  
Our bliss is so frail.

Our youth is so short, and  
Our bliss is so frail,  
Like shadows they flitted,  
Leaving pain in their trail.

Like shadows they flitted,  
Leaving pain in their trail,  
And left us in sunder  
Our dream to bewail.

## TO YOU

ONCE we felt at parting lonely,  
Meetings were so sweet ;  
Now once more we feel so lonely—  
Only when we meet. . . .

Once at parting we would trifle,  
But our hearts would cry ;  
Now we part and sigh, but truly  
Hearts and eyes are dry. . . .

Once it used to be a mystery,  
Now it seems so plain ;  
Once we could not, now we would not  
All the truth explain.

## A DREAM

A GOLDEN dream  
I had in May ;  
Both youth and dream  
Have passed away.

My dream is lost,  
My youth is o'er ;  
I mourn them both,  
My dream the more.

A youthless life  
Still real may seem ;  
But what is life  
Without a dream ?

## A PLEDGE

I PLEDGED my soul on high,  
And borrowed Love's fair dream,  
But lost my dream on earth,  
What will my pledge redeem ?

Now, forfeited, my soul  
Remains a pledge above,  
Whilst I on earth in vain  
Still seek the dream of love.

## TWO SORROWS

MY heart was young and cheerful,  
Life's care I did not know ;  
Then came the grief of mankind,  
And filled my heart with woe.

Now fate, with years, has brought me,  
My own deep grief and pain,  
And now my heart is bursting—  
It cannot both contain.

And as I feel it bursting,  
I call to heav'n and pray :  
O God, take mankind's sorrow,  
Or else take mine away !

## MY HEART

FATE, the heartsmith, on his anvil,  
Had my glowing heart,  
Struck and beat it with his hammer,  
And the sparks did dart,  
In the smithy's puddles falling  
Spark by spark.

When the heart grew cold and hardened,  
Fate, the heartsmith, spoke :  
"Take thy heart, it was not fitted  
For its earthly yoke ;  
Take it back—I've made it human—  
Hard and dark."

## VALE

I WEEP for the morning, the fresh, breezy morning,  
So bracing, so sweet, and so bright ;  
I weep for the morning, the fair, sunny morning,  
That passed into night.

I weep for the flowers, the sun-cherished flowers,  
With fragrance my garden that filled ;  
I weep for the flowers, the tender, sweet flowers,  
Cold Autumn has killed.

I weep for the dreams, and the hopes, and the  
longings,  
With rapture my heart that once filled ;  
I weep for the dreams, and the hopes, and the  
longings,  
Now faded and chilled.

I weep for the heart that so deeply, so truly,  
Has loved, and of love known the pain ;  
I weep for the heart that could love and could suffer,  
And suffered in vain.

### I ASKED THE STARS

I ASKED the stars in heaven,  
One still and star-lit night :  
“ Oh, wherefore, tell me, wherefore  
So pale and cold your light ? ”

“ I know that you are light-worlds,  
A globe each seeming spark ;  
Such hosts of you shine on us,  
Why is our earth so dark ? ”

“ I know that you are flame-worlds,  
A sun each dot of gold ;  
Such hosts of you are burning,  
Why is our earth so cold ? ”



The stars they did not answer—  
We stood so far apart—  
A voice replied beside me :  
“ Enquire within your heart !

“ Your heart—it, too, is star-like,  
A world that seems a spark ;  
It, too, sheds rays around it—  
Why is your path so dark ?

“ It, too, has skiey longings,  
And golden dreams untold,  
It, too, is burning, burning,  
Why is your life so cold ? ”

In vain, the poet's questions  
I heard within my breast ;  
The heart and stars are riddles,  
No mortal ever guessed.

## CHILDREN

HERE they are, my little darlings,  
All their merry throng ;  
Each of them a sportive fairy,  
Each—a living song.

Voices—golden harps sweet sounding ;  
Eyes—transparent streams,  
Deep and sparkling, and reflecting,  
Heaven's purest beams.

Little teeth—carved pearly jewels,  
Waving gold their hair ;  
Merry laughter—bells of silver,  
Ringing in the air.

Songs they are, the little darlings,  
Songs devoid of themes ;  
When I see them play, there spring up  
All my childhood's dreams.

## A RAY

IN his cot my little boy  
Lay so pale and weak,  
And a golden ray of light  
Played upon his cheek.

“ Have you come down from the sky—  
Tell me, golden ray—  
Just to kiss my darling boy,  
Take his pain away ?  
Have the guardian angels, then,  
Sent you from above,  
Just to cheer my ailing pet,  
Bring him heaven’s love ?  
Or, perchance, you have been sent,  
Just to close his eye,  
And to take his angel soul  
Back into the sky ? ”

Silent was the golden ray,  
Silent was I too ;  
But my darling’s pallid face  
Paler, paler grew.

## MY MOTHER'S SONG

A CRADLE-SONG my mother sang ;  
So deep, so sweet, so sad it rang.  
Of mother I am long bereft,  
But why is still her sadness left,  
To live in every song of mine—  
In every line ?

O mother, dear,  
Where did you hear  
That air that taught your darling lad  
A song so sad ?  
And where have I the sadness found ?  
In mother's voice, or word, or sound,  
Or in her melancholy mood,  
Or in her pearly tear that stood  
In eye, and trembled ere it fell ?—  
I cannot tell !

The song I never understood,  
And strange to me was mother's mood ;  
The words I have forgotten long,  
The voice is silent, like the song ;

The eye is closed ; the tear is dry ;  
The sadness cannot die.  
And in my happiest moods and dreams,  
I ever hear that song, meseems,  
And when I muse of love and bliss  
I never miss  
That lullaby of sadness deep—  
And weep.

THE DYING POET<sup>1</sup>

WHITE the robe, and white the "Sister,"  
Bed and linen likewise white ;  
On his bed lies pale the Singer,  
In his eyes dies out the light.

White the face, and white the pillow,  
But his lips and eyes are dark ;  
By his bed I stand in anguish,  
See the last expiring spark.

<sup>1</sup> After the Yiddish.

“Comrade, see, I bring you flowers—  
Tokens of the world’s esteem ;  
Tell me, comrade, what you wish for,  
And of what it is you dream.”

But he looks, with eyes imploring,  
Murmurs something, hard to hear ;  
Smiling gloomily and faintly,  
Beckons, whispers in my ear.

“All is over. . . . Drama ended . . .  
Far too early came the end. . . .  
Have you, brother, yet looked over,  
My new poem in *The Friend*?

“‘Life and Youth’—you must have read it . . .  
There two syllables are wrong . . .  
’Tis not my fault . . . ’Tis a misprint . . .  
They have spoiled that charming song. . . .

“‘Life and Youth’—my latest poem,  
Written but a week ago ;  
Just two syllables are missing,—  
Brother, let the people know. . . .  
Tell them, pray, it is an error . . .  
Just an error . . .”

“ Dearest friend !

Your last wish shall be respected,

I your honour must defend.

'Gainst your ' Life and Youth,' misprinted,

None shall breathe a word of blame.

That the world may not misjudge you,

This I solemnly proclaim :

In the Jewish ' Life and Youth ' song,

Sung amidst our cruel strife,

Just two syllables are missing :

One is Youth and one is Life ! . . . ”

## DISILLUSION

I, TOO, have built enchanted towers

And phantom castles in the air,

I, too, have dreamt of fragrant flowers

That ever sweet remain and fair.

I, too, believed in treasures hidden—

In love and youth that never fade,

But in the flowered groves of Eden

How short a time, O friend, I stayed !

Long ere I climbed youth's magic steeple,  
I knew life's sorrows, tears, and pains ;  
I saw a great and ancient people—  
That freed the world—in servile chains.

I saw it racked, and cursed, and banished,  
For teaching mankind Love and Truth,  
And one by one my sweet dreams vanished  
Together with my youthless youth.

And in the sound of fetters' rattle,  
And in the groans of slaves—meseems,  
I hear a voice : " In life's fierce battle,  
O child, there is no room for dreams."

### MY FAITH

I BELIEVE, O my friend,  
That the day will arrive  
When all nations for peace  
And for justice will strive.



When in kindness and truth  
Soul will answer to soul,  
And when Love in her grace  
Will the peoples control.

When man, humbled, enslaved,  
Will raise proudly his head,  
When no groans will be heaved  
And no tears will be shed.

O my friend, I believe  
In life's heavenly goal,  
In the height of man's mind,  
In the depth of man's soul ;

In the triumph of truth,  
In all mankind's re-birth,  
In the kingdom of light,  
In the glory on earth.

That bright beacon, dear friend,  
Through our fog gleams to me ;  
But between—oh, between,  
What a stormy, wild sea !

And the sea is so deep  
    With its tears, in its glooms ;  
And the shore, that bright shore,  
    So remotely it looms.

And the gale is so fierce,  
    And so dark is the night,  
And the fog is so dense,  
    And so faint is the light ;

That I know, O dear friend,  
    Nor for you nor for me,  
'Tis that shore to attain  
    Through this turbulent sea.

### HARP AND SWORD

I HAVE no armour, helm, or shield  
    From Life's sore darts to save me ;  
My weapon in this battlefield  
    Is but the harp God gave me.

He gave me, too, a heart to sigh  
And pine and bleed for others,  
When from the field I hear the cry :  
“ Help ! help ! we are your brothers.”

It thrills me through with anguish sharp  
To leave their call unheeded ;  
“ Of what avail,” they say, “ your harp,  
Where spear and sword are needed ? ”

I cannot meet their burning eyes  
That righteous wrath betoken ;  
Shamed, dumb, I stand in sorry wise,  
My harp and heart are broken.

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